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A MARKET-ORIENTED STRATEGY OF LONG-RANGE PLANNING FOR MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS

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College of Commerce and Business Administration
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I. Need for Market-Orientation in Long-Range Planning

In the last two decades, we have witnessed an enormous expansion of multinational business among many corporations headquartered in the U.S. By 1969, the U.S. corporations were participating in more than 30 percent of total world trade, were importing products valued in excess of $40 billion dollars and exporting products valued in excess of $26 billion dollars. Correspondingly, the direct foreign investment shot up from less than $8 billion dollars by 1950 to more than $70 billion dollars by 1970. Finally, today most of the top U.S. corporations, according to the Fortune Magazine survey, depend on foreign markets for their sales and profits.

In this growth in multinational business likely to continue for the U.S. corporations? A number of factors suggest that the future growth of U. S. corporations in terms of multinational business will be less than spectacular hereafter. First, a large part of private foreign investment was related to the economic aid programs during the reconstruction days following World War II. The virtual monopoly experienced by the U.S. corporations during that time period is rapidly vanishing as many advanced economies are rebuilt and as the spirit of nationalism begins to pervade increasingly among newer nations. Second, many other foreign countries are heavily participating in multinational business notably West Germany and Japan. The character of their industries is also beginning to take the multinational shape so that the technological gap today is either nonexistent or very rapidly closing in most industries. Third, markets for products

in both advanced and less developed countries are rapidly becoming mature with sufficient number of entries from local indigeneous companies. Both the political and economic considerations encourage these companies to survive and grow often at the expense of foreign corporations. Finally, and most importantly, the U.S. corporations have sadly neglected the marketing orientation in their multinational business activities. During the period of spectacular growth, their attention was concentrated mostly to transfer of technology to other countries and to estimation of risks in committing financial and managerial resources to the new opportunities. Without the temporary competitive advantages of monopoly protections and technological gap, this neglect of marketing orientation is clearly the most vulnerable aspect in the likely decline of U.S. position in multinational business.

At the same time, if history can be of any guide, it is equally inevitable that the U.S. multinational corporations will become more marketing-oriented. After all, this has been the experience in the domestic market for most companies in the early fifties. Unfortunately, the luxury of historical evolution of marketing orientation in multinational business is likely to entail some rude awakening for many U.S. corporations. I think there are several compelling reasons which dictate that immediate attention should be paid in incorporating modern marketing thought in multinational operations. First of all, profits from foreign markets have, to a large extent, disguised the enormous failures in the domestic markets prior to the new marketing orientation. There is no comparable "buffer" activity which will bear the burden of losses in multinational business due to lack of comparable marketing orientation.

Second, private foreign investments are, by definition, more complex because financial and legal complexities are widely different in foreign countries and subject to rapid change. This implies that without the support of market place and its loyalty, it is difficult to survive. Third, the type of lobbying support prevalent within the U.S. to thwart governmental actions is generally not available in most foreign countries. The only support that one can effectively rely upon is to build market loyalties among customers by proper marketing orientation. Finally, the ultimate opportunity lies in the vast populations outside the U.S. A planned modern marketing orientation is likely to go a long way to effectively take part in this opportunity.

II. Strategy for Long-Range Planning

This paper provides a strategic framework of planning and marketing for multinational corporations. The framework is useful for large-scale corporations doing business in several countries, and it is primarily a long-range planning model. The conceptual model is summarized in Figure 1. The various activities and flows within the rectangular box constitute various aspects of modern multinational marketing. The small boxes outside the rectangle are the environmental aspects which constantly influence the marketing process. The solid lines represent direct flow of activities within the marketing process whereas the broken lines represent continuous feedback and interchange between various marketing activities. The environmental influences are depicted with crossed lines. Let me describe the strategic framework for developing multinational marketing planning. In the process, I will distinguish between the current practice in most multinational corporations and what is proposed in this paper.

A. Begin Planning with the Customer and his Expectations

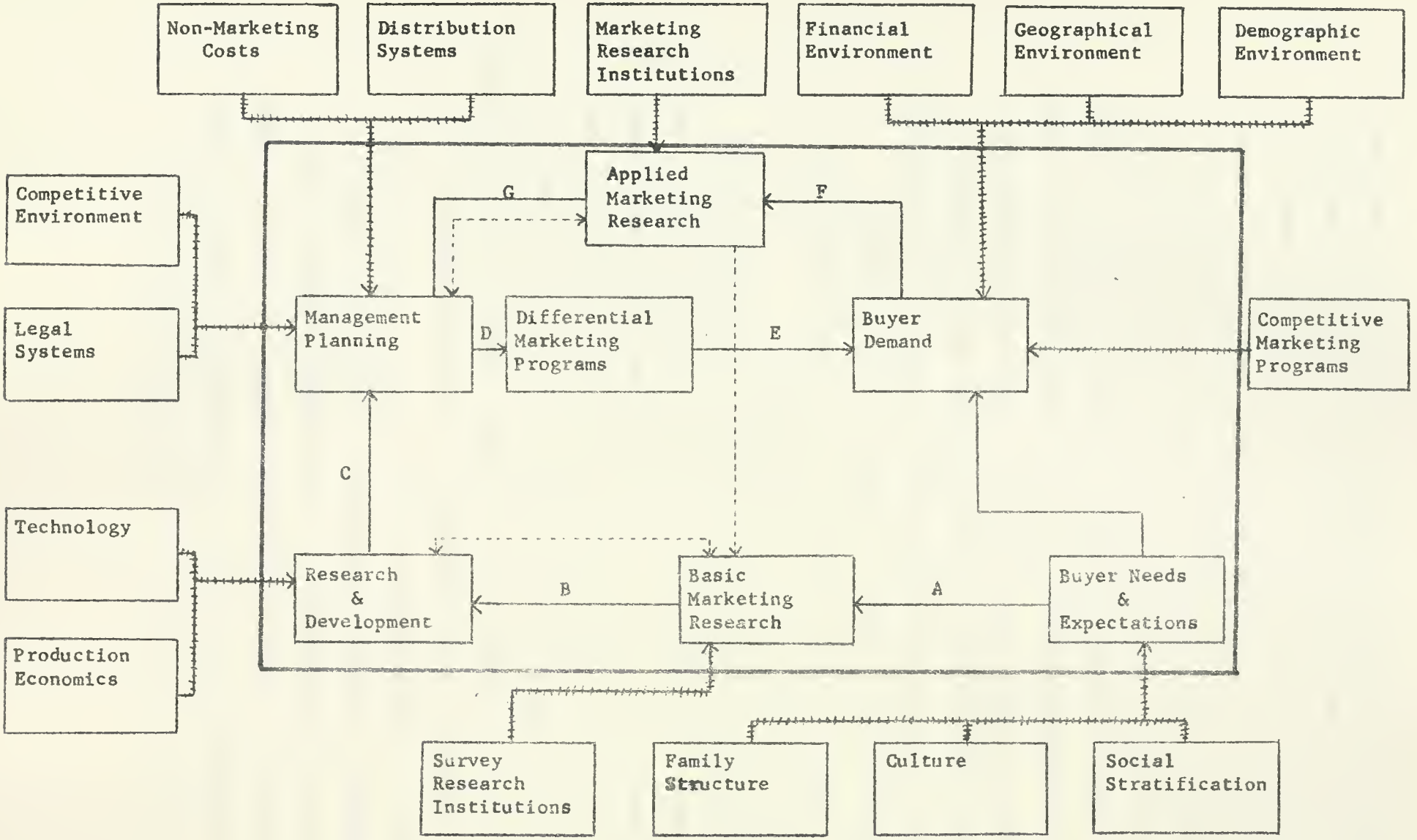


Figure 1

A Strategic Model of Long-Range Planning for Multinational Corporations

In my view, multinational marketing should begin first with the assessment of buyer needs and expectations on a world-wide basis. It should not, therefore, begin after a product concept is developed or after the production facilities are erected. Implicit in this statement, I am pointing out several limitations in the current practice of multinational operations.

First, there is no systematic and continuous assessment of buyer needs and expectations in the current practice of most corporations. Most of the marketing research is post-facto; to find out whether a new concept or product developed by R&D will be acceptable to the customers. Even if there is any effort to assess buyer needs before the concept is developed, such an effort is typically ad hoc. I am suggesting a continuous research effort to systematically monitor present and changing needs of the market place.

Second, the present practice is to do marketing research on a country-by-country basis. In addition, most multinational business decisions are centered around the question as to whether the company should extend its strategic programs to newer countries or adjust it to suit the local conditions. While such a practice was probably quite appropriate during the colonial days and may be useful even today for exporting or trading companies, it tends to be myopic in the long-run. In fact, it is not difficult to trace a number of failures in multinational activities directly to this practice. A world-wide systematic and continuous assessment of buyer needs and expectations is likely to point out that (a) potential markets are mostly in the metropolitan areas especially in the less developed countries, (b) clustering metropolitan areas both within and between

countries is more meaningful from marketing viewpoint, and (c) probably we shall find greater similarity between metropolitan areas across countries than within countries.

Third, the assessment of customer needs and expectations should be based on data collected at the micro level, namely the household or the business unit. The present practice is to assess potential demand from secondary data which are aggregate and typically historical. While these data are useful to some extent, experience has shown that they can easily mislead the conclusions particularly because of their aggregative nature.

Finally, contrary to the current business practice, the emphasis in my strategic framework is on the customer needs and not on the product. It is my belief that this focus on customer needs is more enduring a concept and tends to avoid the myopic tendency which a company is likely to fall into as its products become mature in their life cycle.

The world-wide assessment of buyer needs and expectations should be done by establishing a longitudinal panel in selected geographical areas. The selection of specific geographical areas should be based on clustering of all the geographical areas of the world in terms of their similarity on the environmental factors such as political stability, market opportunity, economic development, cultural unity and legal barriers in doing business with the area. The geographical areas can be countries or preferably metropolitan areas.

The buyer needs and expectations represent his evaluation of a product's potential to satisfy some finite number of criteria

he uses to choose among alternatives. For example, Volkswagen may be favorably evaluated on price, economy of operation, service and resale value, but it may be unfavorably evaluated on size, comfort and sportyness. From a world-wide planning and marketing viewpoint, the basic question is this: Do customers vary in their needs and expectations no matter where they live and however we define them? In my opinion, it is irrelevant whether the customers are poor or rich, illiterate or educated, black or nonblack, live in tropical or temperate zones, if their expectations are also correspondingly not different.

It is my belief that the buyer expectations are largely determined by the social environment in which consumers get conditioned to establishing choice criteria in specific buying situations. Furthermore, it is the same social environment which acts as a change agent in buyer expectations over a period of time. The four major social factors determining buyer expectations are (1) family, (2) reference groups, (3) life style and social stratification, and (4) culture including ethnic subcultures. It is not within the purview of this paper to describe the process by which these social factors shape buyer expectations. The reader is referred to Howard and Sheth (1969) for a general discussion, and to Sheth (1971a) for a specific theory of family influences on buyer expectations. However, I do wish to emphasize that buyer expectations are probably more governed by the consumer's social environment (past and present) than either by his biological needs, his personality or by the marketing efforts of multinational corporations. Furthermore, this factor is likely to be true no matter how primitive or advanced the country is in which we are

studying the consumers. Second, a specific social factor is not likely to equally dominate buyer expectations across all buying situations; to the contrary, the process or by which a social factor shapes buyer expectations is presumed to be specific to each buying situation. Finally, it is very possible that we may find greater heterogeneity of buyer expectations within a country than between countries. This is yet another reason to minimize the importance of geographical and territorial boundaries in long-range planning and marketing.

B. Distinguish Between Basic and Applied Marketing Research

We must distinguish between basic marketing research and applied marketing research. Just as there was no basic research and development two decades ago in most companies, there is today no basic marketing research activity. In the long-range planning of a multinational corporation, basic marketing research is essential. My view is that the world-wide continuous assessment of customer needs and expectations should be the responsibility of basic marketing research staff. Furthermore, this activity should be centralized at the corporate level in the multinational corporation to maintain world-wide perspective.

In monitoring buyer needs and expectations the basic marketing research is likely to perform at least the following things: First, it will bring to bear professional and systematic effort to provide a common understanding of market needs instead of the ad hoc and often incomparable research presently focused on products. Second, it will make explicit the assumptions of R&D about the market needs

in developing new products, and therefore, subject to examination and criticism. Finally, it will act as the bridge between the R&D expertise with respect to technology and production economics and the unfulfilled needs and expectations of the market place.

The basic marketing research is likely to vary its procedures in assessing buyer needs and expectations from one geographical area to another due to differences in sophistication and availability of survey research institutions. For example, in some countries telephone interviews may be impossible because only a few possess them whereas in other countries mail questionnaire may be less useful due to illiteracy and lack of postal facilities. There is, however, sufficient knowledge available today on cross-cultural survey research to enable the company to establish a viable basic marketing research unit.

C. Make R&D More Market-Oriented

The role of Research & Development (R&D) is to attempt to convert specific recommendations from the basic marketing research into viable product offerings by taking into account technology and production economics. The recommendations from basic marketing research can be as simple as packaging changes to as complex as developing a new concept from the scratch. In the model, therefore, R&D is envisioned to be market-oriented instead of technology-oriented. The latter unfortunately is the more common reality in today's multinational corporations.

I am also suggesting that the organizational importance and de facto power of R&D be neutralized by the establishment of the

basic marketing research unit. Ideally, R&D people will provide technological and economic expertise and the basic marketing research will provide psychological and marketing expertise in the common objective of matching market's needs and expectations with mass production facilities of the corporation. In view of the interdependent roles between R&D and basic marketing research, the model assumes a feedback loop between the two activities. For example, R&D develops a new packaging scheme based on the recommendations from basic marketing; the new packaging scheme is then tested by the latter with recommendations to modify if market reactions are not satisfactory, and so on. I presume considerable interaction between the two entities at least until the test marketing phase of any new product introduction is completed.

D. Management is like the Diamond Cutter

The concrete proposals as outcomes of the joint efforts of R&D and basic marketing research are recommended to the management. In addition to the routine activity of monitoring relative position of existing products in many markets, the management must spend considerable time in reviewing new proposals. This will enable it to maintain the dynamic element and be prepared to make quick decisions when they are demanded due to some abrupt change in the market environment.

The role of the management is analogous to that of the diamond cutter. It must attempt to convert the concrete opportunities dug up by both R&D and the basic marketing research units in terms of profitable and societally useful means of satisfying buyer demand.

It is, therefore, a very crucial role, and following the analogy, not many concrete proposals will become viable modules to achieve corporate goals.

Just as considerable skill and experience is required to become a good diamond cutter, the management also requires considerable experience and skill in decision-making to cope with a large number of environmental factors. These factors are classified as (1) competitive structure, (2) legal environment, (3) nonmarketing costs and (4) distribution system. Since these factors are widely known and discussed in many books, I will not elaborate on their importance here. The only relevant point to make here is that these factors are likely to vary widely from one segment of the market to another segment, whether the segments are based on clusterings of countries, metropolitan areas or some other entities.

E. Strategy of Differential Marketing Programs

The output of managerial decision-making will result in specific marketing programs on a world-wide basis. The marketing programs are likely to be differentiated from one segment of the world market to another segment. This differentiation should be with respect to both the budget allocations and the specific emphasis of marketing mix elements.

The specific marketing programs should be designed based on the concept of world segmentation. Unlike differentiating markets on a country basis, the most viable and profitable segmentation basis seems to be the examination of underlying

factors which determine buyer demand. These factors can be broadly classified as buyer expectations and buying climate. The first factor was briefly discussed before and it is based on culture, social stratification and family structure. The second factor (buying climate) refers to the specific situation in which consumers make decisions to buy and consume goods and services. It includes the economic, demographic and physical settings in which buyers go about choosing and consuming products and services. It is based on financial factors (disposable personal income, asset holdings, etc.), geographical factors (temperature, humidity & altitude; tropical vs. temperature climate, etc.) and demographic factors (size of family, age distributions of family members, life cycle of family etc.). Although not invariant, these three factors are presumed to be relatively stable and not fluctuating from day to day. Furthermore, I think changes in these factors, whenever they occur, are abrupt and somewhat cyclical. Once again, it is not within the purview of this paper to describe the process by which these factors determine the buying climate. The reader is referred to Howard and Sheth (1969).

What are the implications of these two factors for market planning by which we mean the allocation of resources among the elements of marketing mix? Even though I do not agree with the traditional classification of marketing mix in terms of the four Ps (product, place, promotion, and price), we will examine the implications of segmentation in terms of developing either universal or selective traditional marketing mix strategies for various

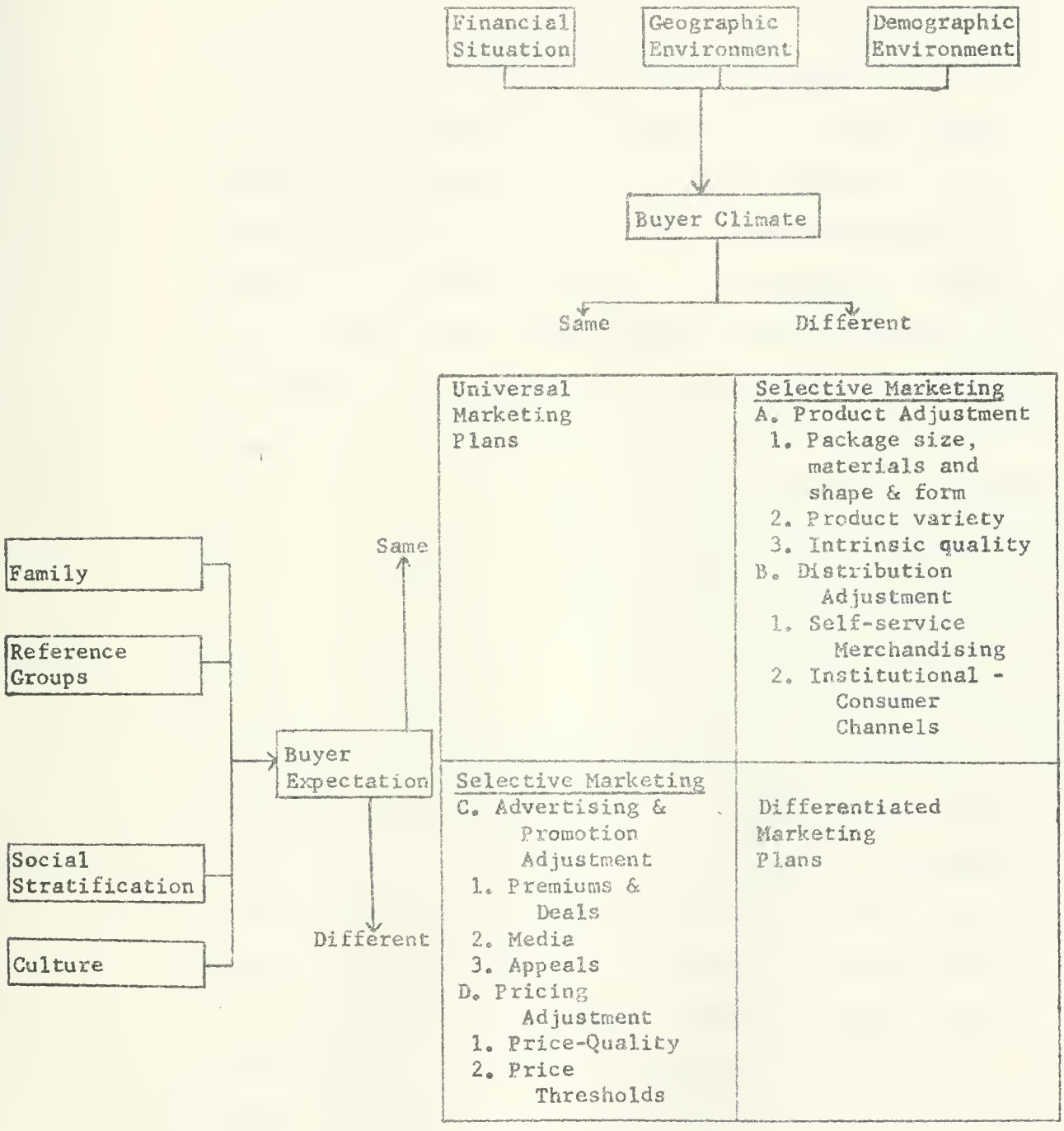
segments in the market place. Furthermore, when a selective strategy is implied, we will attempt to isolate specific elements of the marketing mix which should be adjusted and adapted to the requirements of the segments.

Perhaps the simplest way is to examine whether there are similarities or differences among segments with respect to the buyer expectations or the buying climate or both. In figure 2, a four-fold classification is made based on the interaction of these two factors in a dichotomous way.

1. If the buyer expectations and the buying climate are the same between any two segments, however defined (metropolitan areas, racial background or national sovereignty) the planning should be based on a common marketing mix program for both of them. In other words, no matter how we derived the two segments of the market, there are no differences between them to warrant separate and selective marketing programs. In the United States, there is a growing belief that many grocery products and some durable appliances should follow a universal marketing program because virtually there are no differences among consumers with respect to both the buyer expectations and the buying climate. In fact, this feeling of universal marketing is even more prevalent in several multinational corporations which market their products in most parts of the world. For example, the soft drinks industry follows virtually the same marketing program all over the world based on this concept of universal, undifferentiated market (Keegan 1968). For examples from other industries, see Dunn (1967), Peebles (1967) and Ryans (1969).

Figure 2

A Scheme for Differentiated Marketing Programs



The universal marketing programs typically tend to be very attractive to marketing managers for a number of reasons. First, the cost of selective marketing activities is minimized so that the same amount of financial resources go a longer way. This cost saving phenomenon is, furthermore, not limited to simply advertising and promotion but it is equally relevant to all the elements of the marketing mix. Second, a simplified world is typically more preferred because it is a parsimonious world in terms of organizational communication, coordination and control; the chances of the Murphy's Law becoming operative are less than in a more complex world of segmented markets.

2. However, it is not likely that all products and services have universal world markets. Perhaps, the most common phenomenon is the one where the buyer expectations are the same across countries and contents but the buying climate is different among them. In other words, consumer expectations are the same but the conditions in which they buy and consume are different with respect to economic, geographic, and demographic factors. A selective marketing mix is likely to be more effective in this situation. Furthermore, the adjustment in marketing mix should be with respect to the product and place (distribution) elements in the marketing mix.

a. With respect to product adjust, there are several distinct possibilities. The simplest is marketing of the product in different packaging sizes. For example, the demographic factors such as life cycle of the family, and number of children may create different buying climates between segments such that one

segment is a heavy user of the product and the other is a light user of the same product. Similarly, geographic and economic factors may also produce differential buying climates between the two segments. This difference naturally implies distinct packaging sizes of the same product to fit the consumption cycles of each segment. The relevance of packaging sizes is perhaps most dramatic in international marketing. Many companies are forced to package differently in under-developed countries; for example, chewing gum and cigarettes are packaged and sold in single units in many under-developed countries because the buying climate is considerably different. In a more subtle way, the buying climate also requires most companies to introduce new products in at least two sizes.

A second type of product adjustment desired due to different buying climates among segments is product variety. Often, the same product is consumed by people at different places and occasions in which the surrounding environment necessitates some difference in the buying climate. For example, the second or the third television and radio within the family require a different type or variety. Similarly, packaging variety is required when people consume the same product outside the home in contrast to in-home consumption. In this type of adjustment we include all the packaging varieties be it with respect to color, shape or design.

A third type of product adjustment is with respect to the intrinsic quality of the product. Although buyer expectations

are the same, the financial factors often necessitate marketing of different qualities of the same product. This has led to the availability of durable appliances such as automobiles, radios, and television sets across multinational markets which vary considerably in quality. Finally, geographical and other factors often necessitate product change even though the image of the product remains the same. For example, detergents and gasolines are varied with respect to their physical attributes due to climatic requirements. Similarly, the recent safety requirements in the United States are bringing about changes in the automobiles exported to that country.

b. The adjustments in distribution of the product due to different buying climates among segments are many and at the same time obvious. Most of the recent innovations in retail merchandising such as the supermarket and other self-service outlets, the mail order houses, and the automated merchandising are some of the obvious examples to cater to different segments of the market although the buyer expectations are the same. A more subtle aspect of distribution adjustment relates to separating the institutional buyers from the households. It would appear that this type of marketing mix adjustment is likely to be more effective in service industries such as passenger airlines or health care industries.

3. A more fascinating situation is the one where the buying climate is the same but the buyer expectations are different among the segments. In my view, the primary candidates for adjustment in this combination are advertising and promotion, brand

imagery and price from among the elements.

a. With respect to advertising and promotion, there are several distinct possibilities of marketing mix adjustment. First we know by now that buyer expectations vary considerably with respect to the performance of, and perceived risks in, certain products. These differences in buyer expectations have resulted in differential proneness of consumers toward promotions including deals and premiums. This has led to recommendations with respect to selective promotional effort to various segments of consumers. For example, consumers living in metropolitan areas or who are non-white are typically found not to be deal prone consumers except in underdeveloped countries where markets are in metropolitan areas only. The second area of adjustment with respect to advertising and promotion relates to selective media choices matching the segments. Different buyer expectations are likely to be correlated with different media exposures, preferences and habits (Sheth 1971b). Although, there is no direct evidence as yet to support this statement, recent research on distinct media habits of different psychographic segments seems to be a useful corollary to this statement. The final, and probably the most important, possibility of adjustment in advertising and promotion is presentation of different product appeals and brand imagery to different segments which have distinct buyer expectations. The most obvious examples come from industries such as cigarettes and automobiles due to the nature of monopolistic competition. There are artificial packaging differences usually accompanying this type of marketing mix

adjustment. Indeed, a number of basic innovations have proved so useful that the same concept is marketed differently in different segments. For example, instant breakfast is marketed as a substitute of cereals, as a dietetic product in place of luncheon or dinner, and as a supplemental in-between meal snack food. In multinational marketing, even the packaging differences are not needed. Bicycles, for example, are promoted as durable and convenient vehicles for commuting purposes in most under developed countries but as sports and Summer fun product in many advanced countries. Similarly, tea may be a national drink in one country whereas, a medicinal remedy in some other country. Often we find that the same durable appliances are marketed as necessities in some countries and as conspicuous consumption items in some other countries.

It is probably appropriate here to comment on the recent controversy as to whether advertising should be universal or national for multinational business purposes. The first school of thought asserts that the basic needs, wants and expectations today transcend the geographical, national and cultural boundaries. "This school of thought holds that the desire to be beautiful is universal and that advertising is more effective when it pictures a woman as she would like to be rather than as she is... Most people everywhere, from Argentina to Zanzibar, want a better way of life for themselves and for their families" (Fatt 1964, p. 18). It would, therefore, prefer to search for fundamental similarities across countries and capitalize on them by providing universal

appeals for the product. The second school of thought, however, asserts that even though it is true that human nature is the same everywhere it is just as true that a German will always remain a German, and a Frenchman will always remain a Frenchman (Lenormand 1964). It would, therefore, prefer to develop separate and heterogeneous product appeals for each country to capitalize on the differences among nationalities.

It should be obvious that both schools of thought are fighting on wrong issues. The artificial boundaries of nations and states are not the critical factors to judge similarities or differences among people. In addition, the buyer expectations are probably more governed by his social and cultural environment than by his biogenic and fundamental motivations as we discussed earlier. Finally, it is always possible to find greater similarity between countries and greater heterogeneity within a country with regard to customer expectations about a specific product or service. In summary, whether advertising appeal should be universal or national largely depends on the empirical observation that buyer expectations are universal or heterogeneous about a product across countries.

b. A second element of marketing mix which should be adjusted when buyer expectations are different is pricing. Often the buyers use an acceptable price range to reflect their values and expectations in specific decisions. This in turn has led to the phenomenon of price-quality relationship in several product categories. It is, therefore, possible to market essentially the same product at

different price levels to match different buyer expectations. Outside of the U.S. and Canada, cigarettes are a good example of this type of adjustment. Also, most regulated industries such as the telephone industry, are allowed price discrimination in order to match differential buyer expectations.

4. Finally, there are numerous situations especially in consumer durable goods, where segments have different buying climate and different buyer expectations. Most of the marketing research in the segmentation area presumes this combination of different buyer expectations and different buying climate among groups of consumers. It should, however, be pointed out that market place may not necessarily be so complex in all buying situations.

When both the buying climate and the buyer expectations are different, the effective strategy is the development of distinct marketing mix programs in which all the elements are adjusted or segmented. In other words, product, distribution, promotion, and price are systematically varied to meet the unique requirements of each segment. This, in short, tantamounts to marketing "separate" products even though manufactured in the same way. The examples are too many to cite. In general, we should expect that when the buyer expectations and the buying climate are different with respect to a specific industry, the strategy of distinct types of products and services will prove very effective. Examples of such distinct types are coffee (regular, instant, freeze dried, Espresso, etc.) and automobiles (economy, compact, subcompact station wagon, convertible, personal luxury cars, etc.).

F. The Role of Applied Marketing Research

The assessment and continuous reporting of buyer demand is the function of applied marketing research. In addition to company's own records, this entity must understand and record market demand at the micro level. Fortunately, a number of syndicated marketing research services such as MRCA or Atwood Panels are available so that the applied marketing research does not have to set up its own data collection activities.

A second major activity of the applied marketing research is to carry out experimentation with differential marketing programs including the test marketing activities. It is my hope that this applied marketing research will perform similar liason function between marketing management and market demand as does the basic marketing research between buyer needs and company's Research & Development.

III. Implications for Multinational Business

What are the implications of the strategic model presented in this paper? First of all, the model encourages the multinational corporation to examine the world as potential market place. As such, piece meal and trial-and-error efforts of the present multinational expansion is given a more systematic orientation. This will in turn enable the company to avoid costly mistakes in one part of the world and take advantages of opportunity present in some other part of the world.

Secondly, the model emphasizes greater customer-oriented marketing planning. A number of benefits arise from this orientation. For example, product failure rate is considerably dimished, better marketing and merchandising effectiveness is attained, and more stable pattern of

continued success is derived. All of these benefits have been demonstrated in the domestic marketing.

Third, the model points out the need to go beyond aggregate secondary data. Often, irrevocable marketing decisions are based on either poor or irrelevant information with the consequence that marketing success is still more by accident than by design.

Finally, the model puts in proper perspective the role of marketing research in multinational business operations. It has been neglected so far and more than optimal reliance has been placed on the capability of R&D to provide insights on market desires.

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